Final report to the Minister of Education
The Honourable Sandra Pupatello

May 2006

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

The report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education

Submitted by
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Ontario

Working Table on Special Education

The Working Table on Special Education was established by former Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy in May 2005 to reform how students with special needs receive support in school. The Working Table brought together representatives from the education community including educators, administrators, parents, special education support staff and students. This report from the co-chairs is based on recommendations made by the Working Table members in December 2005.

Kathleen Wynne, MPP for Don Valley West, has served as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education since October 2004. She facilitated the Parent Voice in Education Project (PVEP) whose recommendations resulted in the first-ever Ontario Parent Involvement Policy and conducted a province-wide review of adult education. Her report *Ontario Learns* resulted in the creation of a new Adult Education Policy Unit.

Dr. Sheila Bennett, Associate Professor and Chair of the Preservice Department, Faculty of Education of Brock University, has taught special education both in her home province of Newfoundland, Labrador and in Ontario. Dr. Bennett completed her doctoral work at the University of Toronto and pursues research in the areas of teacher collaboration, at-risk youth, brain injury and inclusion. She is on the executive committees of chapters of the Council for Exceptional Children and the Learning Disabilities Association (Ontario).

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May 12, 2006

The Honourable Sandra Pupatello
Minister of Education

Dear Minister Pupatello,

We are happy to submit *Special Education Transformation: The Report of the Co-chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education* to you for your consideration. It is the product developed as a result of a series of discussions at the Working Table on Special Education where critical issues in special education were raised by people from across the province who work in the field, as well as by parents and students. Most recently, we invited the Working Table members back to review the report and their advice is included here. Overall, the majority of them told us that the report was a good reflection of our discussions and that it clarified shared goals and recommendations. We feel that this outcome of the Working Table process was based on members' common goal to always keep the best interests of students in mind.

We have attempted to capture the common ground in the Working Table discussions, recognizing that there continue to be philosophical differences among many of the stakeholder groups. Those differences are most pronounced on the issue of inclusion of students with special education needs in the regular classroom. There is a school of thought that would move the system as quickly as possible to a pure inclusion model – a model that would still allow for transitional congregated placements and withdrawals. Another school of thought argues that for the foreseeable future and perhaps, ideally, there would continue to be a range of placements for students with special education needs. The Working Table acknowledges that the regular classroom should continue to be the placement of first choice but that a range of placements may at times be necessary for practical reasons.

There was, however, complete agreement on many points including:

- More and ongoing professional development is necessary for educators, teachers' assistants, administrators, associated professionals, and indeed for parents in the best practices and programs for students with special education needs.

- If the needs of students with special education needs are to be met, services delivered by MEDU, MCYS, MCSS, and MOHLTC must be coordinated at the community level. The child must be positioned at the centre of a circle of service where education is a priority. Coordination of service at the ministry level, led by MEDU, should mirror and push the local practice.

- School boards must be held accountable for the academic achievement of all students and for the reporting of that achievement to parents.

- It must become clearer to all – teachers, students, and parents – what is meant by achievement for all students, especially for those students who in modified or alternative programs.

- The funding model that is put in place must ensure stability and predictability for boards so that they may plan program and service delivery for their students.

The Working Table's recommendations to the ministry suggest strategies for achieving these ends.

There are a number of points that were not discussed by the Working Table, but which we, as co-chairs, put forward for your consideration:

- We suggest you consider the introduction of a full annual professional development day dedicated to special education.

- We suggest supporting the inclusion of a special education component in the Induction Year program.

- We suggest the development of centres of excellence that will focus on specific areas of concern within the field of special education, with a priority placed on the development of centres focusing on children's mental health.

Members of the Working Table looked at the practice of other jurisdictions and explored with staff the possibility of a funding option that would bring together the special education, ESL, and LOG funding envelopes and allow special education funds to be allocated as part of a "readiness to learn" grant. The Working Table has concluded that there is not yet enough evidence to support such a proposal.

Having reviewed the recommendations and participated in the discussions, it would seem clear that a specific focus on building capacity through the enhancement of the knowledge base of those working with students with diverse learning needs will lead to improved practice across the province. Making it a priority to educate, equip, and motivate educational professionals across the province will lead to improved educational outcomes for all students.

This process has been a remarkable exercise in collaboration. It is difficult in any endeavour for individuals to put aside the interests of the group to which they belong. We feel, however, that to a large extent this happened in the production of these recommendations. The members of this group are people who care deeply about the system, have years of experience, and want to see improvements for the students the system is intended to serve.

With that in mind, it is important to note that effective collaboration has as its foundation shared accountability and responsibility. To enter into a dialogue and come to a consensus implies that all participants, in this case educators, parents, and the ministry, recognize both the difficulties of the past and agree on the solutions. It is essential that each participant is willing to contribute what is necessary in order to achieve the agreed-upon goals.

We believe that it is time now for these ideas to be shared with school and education communities around the province. The recommendations of the Working Table need to be aired publicly. Response and feedback through broader public engagement will complement the report and serve to help and support you to formulate a solid strategy.

Thank you for allowing us to take part in this creative exercise. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the educational experience of all students in Ontario.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila Bennett
Co-chair

Kathleen Wynne
Co-chair

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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre
Transformation de l'éducation de l'enfance en difficulté : Rapport des coprésidentes avec les recommandations de la Table de concertation sur l'éducation de l'enfance en difficulté, 2006

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, the Minister of Education introduced An Amendment to the Education Act, commonly referred to as Bill 82. The central component of Bill 82 was the requirement that the publicly funded school system in Ontario be responsible for the education of all Ontario students including those with special needs. This legislation was based on the principle of "universal access" to public education, which guarantees the right of all children to be enrolled in a publicly funded school. School boards were to assume responsibility for providing suitable programming for all children, including special education programs and services for exceptional pupils in their language of instruction.

With this now-universal access to publicly funded education, there has been an increased demand to focus on improving student achievement and ensuring accountability for the use of public funds. The recently released Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6, 2005 and the related Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) Special Education Projects support improving student achievement and building educator capacity in the area of special education. These initiatives, particularly the guiding principles in the Expert Panel Report, have contributed to the findings and recommendations of the Working Table contained in this report. The following beliefs sum up the Expert Panel's guiding principles:

- All students can succeed.
- Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.

- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student's literacy and numeracy development.
- Each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning.
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.
- Fairness is not sameness.

The Ministry of Education is committed to promoting high levels of student achievement, reducing gaps in student achievement, and building high levels of public confidence in the education system. Numerous initiatives focus on: identifying and supporting effective teaching, learning, and assessment practices; identifying and supporting effective gap-reducing practices; engaging students, families, and communities in building supportive learning environments; and increasing system effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness.

In July 2004, Minister Kennedy announced that the Intensive Support Amount (ISA) system of special education funding would be replaced with one that focuses on outcomes, local decision-making, and reduced administrative requirements. The premise is that every student deserves a good outcome. They must be allowed to reach their highest level of achievement based on ability and willingness to work hard. How we as a society engage children in learning reflects our sense of responsibility, and this is especially true for how we engage those whose learning requires special attention, such as those needing accommodations or varied teaching approaches.

In anticipation of this future direction, the Minister set up a Working Table on Special Education Reform in May 2005 to look at how program policy, funding, and accountability at the school, board, and ministry levels might best be changed to support a system for special education that aligns with the government's overall strategic goals. The Working Table was an extension of the Education Partnership Table, which is a practical forum designed to solicit broad and diverse insights from the education sector.

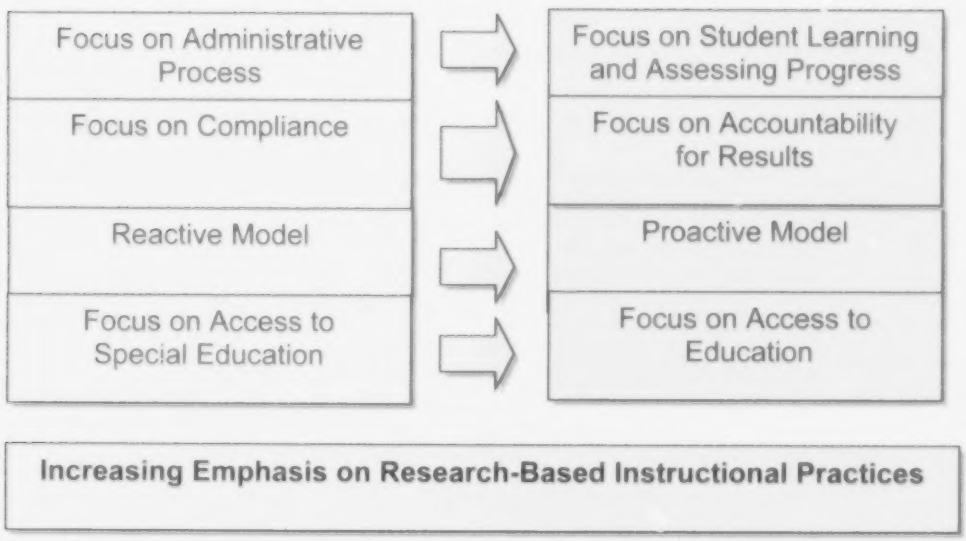
The Working Table met a total of six times between May and December 2005 and reconvened in May 2006 to review the co-chairs' report and the Working Table members' recommendations. The participants were nominated by major stakeholder groups, including a number of parent organizations. Their deliberations included an environmental survey, critical issues identification, provincial and inter-jurisdictional reviews of special education policy, priority setting for funding decisions, examination of various funding models, validation of policy goals and objectives, and development of recommended actions.

The task at hand for the Working Table was to make recommendations to the Minister of Education regarding a new focus for special education program policy and accountability in Ontario that would be supported by a new funding mechanism. The issues identified were complex and required complex answers. Members of the Working Table were invited to provide their experience, wisdom, and knowledge in order to produce the best responses possible for the consideration of the Minister. Early on, the Working Table set out to define the critical issues that shaped the overall policy discussion. These were:

- How do we define success, achievement, and learning for students with diverse learning needs across the broad spectrum of exceptionality?

- What are the desired characteristics of programs and services and the pedagogical model that will successfully meet the needs of all students?
- Is the vision of an inclusive system one that we support and what do we mean by an inclusive system?
- How can the ministry most equitably and most effectively fund school boards to provide those programs and services so that the highest learning benefit accrues to the whole range of students?
- What are the characteristics of a funding system that will generate the outcomes we seek?

This inquiry shaped a lively discussion and resulted in a number of recommendations for the future of special education in Ontario. The following chart was developed to represent the changes deemed necessary to transform special education in Ontario.


Focus on Administrative Process
Focus on Student Learning and Assessing Progress
Focus on Compliance
Focus on Accountability for Results
Reactive Model
Proactive Model
Focus on Access to Special Education
Focus on Access to Education
Increasing Emphasis on Research-Based Instructional Practices

With this paradigm shift as their guide, the Working Table members developed a vision for special education programs and services and the changes that would be needed in education to support the wide range of diverse learners in Ontario.

This vision of a transformed system represents the desired state for special education. Some components are already in place for some students, but the Working Table's goal is to see this vision as a reality and to spark a public discussion on this important area of our public education system that will result in better policy and better supports for those children with special education needs in our province.

A SYSTEM TRANSFORMED . . .

In a transformed system, special education programs and services would support a learning environment that enables students to acquire, demonstrate, and apply the knowledge and skills necessary to maximize their potential for success in school and beyond. Based on their individual learning needs and abilities, all students would receive supports in schools that foster a culture of commitment to achievement.

The Ontario curriculum would be the primary focus for students' learning and demonstrated achievement. All students would be engaged in learning, and their achievements would be valued and recognized. While it is important to acknowledge the primacy of curriculum, student achievement in other skill areas would be recognized. Students would have access to the supports, services, programs, and range of placements that they need so that they can achieve their potential.

Strong leadership at the school, district school board, and ministry levels would contribute to an environment of collaboration, respect, and trust. Educators, administrators, and support staff would have access to ongoing professional development and training opportunities so that they have the skills and knowledge to effectively recognize and meet a wide range of students' learning needs. Parents would be active participants in decisions related to the program and service provisions for their children.

The Ministry of Education would provide a sound legislative and policy framework for education. It would promote research in special education, the sharing of effective practices, and the coordination of services to enable students with special education needs to attend and to learn at school. Sustainable special education funding would support effective programs and services. Reporting requirements would be linked to student achievement while supporting public transparency, accountability, and efficiency.

To achieve the desired transformation and realize this vision for special education in Ontario, the following critical issues must be addressed:

1. Student Success and Access to Curriculum
2. Professional Development
3. Identification and Support Options
4. Service Integration
5. Parent Collaboration
6. Accountability and Reporting
7. Research
8. Special Education Funding

Some Facts about Special Education in Ontario

There are twelve definitions of exceptionalities. School boards reported the following exceptionality rates within the special education population for the 2003–04 school year:

- Behaviour (7.3%)
- Giftedness (12.6%)
- Mild Intellectual Disability (13.3%)
- Developmental Disability (5.3%)
- Physical Disability (1.6%)
- Blind and Low Vision (0.4%)
- Autism (3.2%)
- Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (1.3%)
- Language Impairment (6.7%)
- Speech Impairment (0.4%)
- Learning Disability (43.1%)
- Multiple Exceptionalities (5.3%)

In 2003–04, school boards reported 275,566 or 12.94 per cent of all students received special education programs and services. This included 187,375 or 8.79 per cent formally identified as exceptional by an IPRC and 88,191 or 4.15 per cent not formally identified.

Of the total number of students receiving special education programs and services, 243,425 were reported to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) while another 32,141 students were reported as not having an IEP.

Of the students receiving special education programs and services, 81 per cent were reported to have been placed in regular classrooms.

The reported incidence of high-needs students doubled between 2001 and 2004, going from 1.4 per cent (27,785 students) to 2.8 per cent (54,137 students) of all students. During the same period, claims for the Intensive Support Amount funding doubled, despite the fact that enrolment declined overall.

By 2003, Ontario ranked among the highest of any province or state in North America in terms of the reported incidence of students with acute or severe special needs.

Education funding was projected to be $17.2 billion in 2005–06, with $1.9 billion of this amount dedicated to special education funding.

Special education funding increased by 1 per cent between 2003–04 and 2004–05 year, and by another 6.8 per cent in 2005–06.

1. Student Success and Access to Curriculum

Goal: Improved learning for all students receiving special education programs and services

In a transformed system, the ability of educators to develop the full potential of every child, no matter the extent of the student's needs and whether they are related to a disability or to giftedness, would be enhanced. However, educators would not do this in isolation and would need to develop partnerships among all individuals who are participating in students' development (e.g., parents,[1] special education/resource teacher, principal, psychologist, speech-language pathologists, and community services staff).

All students would be expected to achieve both academically and socially. The first consideration regarding placement would continue to be the regular classroom. A range of placement options would continue to be available for students whose needs would not be met within the regular classroom. These placements would be duration-specific, intervention-focused, and subject to regular reviews.

Objective:
Every student receives effective instruction, based on research, continual assessment, and successful, evidence-based practice.

Expectations for student achievement would be agreed upon by educators and parents and clearly articulated. Classroom teachers would have ongoing training in a variety of successful practices, such as universal design and differentiated instruction, appropriate to the range of students in the class. They would have the expertise to deal with a range of students in their classrooms and would be supported in their work by informed school leaders and through the provision of appropriate material and personnel resources (e.g., curriculum

[1] Throughout this report, the term *parents* refers to parent(s) and guardian(s).

experts, teachers' assistants,[2] health professionals, and community-based support staff). Classroom teachers would be provided with opportunities to enhance their existing skills in order to collaborate effectively with teachers' assistants, caregivers, interpreters, and other support staff.

Objective:
The ministry has data and information to measure improvement in student achievement and to ensure that school and school board targets have been met.

The ministry would continue to provide curriculum and instructional resources to schools, complete with performance indicators that supplement and complement the curriculum. Beyond performance indicators for students who need program modification and/or accommodation, the ministry would work with school boards and provincial and demonstration schools to develop consistent performance indicators for students in alternative programs.

Special attention would be paid to transitions from school to school and board to board, as well as between elementary, secondary, provincial and demonstration schools, and postsecondary and work settings. A plan for communication between family and school, in addition to transition planning, would be required to facilitate a smooth passage for students. Pre-school and postsecondary resource personnel would be invited to participate in developing and implementing transition plans.

[2] The term *teachers' assistant* is referred to in section 170.3 of the Education Act. Use of the term in this report is intended to include the various titles used by school boards for this role.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Coordinate all ministry initiatives related to improving student achievement (e.g., Student Success, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat) to include students who have special education needs.
- Require all curriculum documents and related forms (such as report cards) to address the needs of the full range of learners in the school system.
- Develop resources related to effective instructional practices or program indicators for educators based on specific learning profiles and/or areas of need.
- Continue to refine and develop appropriate measures to assess and track progress of those students who have modified curriculum expectations and/or alternative programs, including measures for pre-Grade 1 and alternative skills.
- Investigate, share, and implement effective transition practices for students with special education needs. Multiple transition points such as entry to school, between schools, between elementary and secondary panels, and school to postsecondary destinations should be characterized by collaboration between professionals, family, and student, and by coordination of service providers.

2. Professional Development

Goal: Increased capacity of all staff to educate a wider range of learners

In a transformed system, ongoing high-quality professional development for teachers, teachers' assistants, principals, and supervisory officers would be available throughout the province. All program training needs to incorporate strategies and training appropriate for all students. Evidence-based professional development opportunities would be available in a variety of formats and at a variety of levels to meet individual requirements. Mentoring for classroom teachers would also be incorporated in the professional development offerings. Required qualifications for teachers and teachers' assistants would be clearly articulated and the role of teacher assistant as support for teachers would be defined. Universities and colleges would be encouraged to include specific planning and instructional strategies on teaching for diversity and for a wide range of students as part of their regular pre-service and continuing education programs. Practicum opportunities would occur in classrooms where the types of curriculum-based, organizational, and management strategies necessary to provide effective instruction for the diverse array of learning needs in the classroom are demonstrated on a regular basis.

Objective:
All staff have the knowledge and skills to provide supports and interventions to meet the needs of students in a timely and effective manner.

School-focused professional development would be available for associated professionals. Whenever possible, these opportunities would be offered in collaboration with professional associations.

Parents would have the opportunity to access information and resources so that they could be well informed and able to participate effectively in discussions and decisions related to the program and services for their child.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Require, through the Ontario College of Teachers, the ompletion of a minimum of a half-course on special education before issuing an Ontario teaching certificate.
- Provide direction and funding for specific and systematic professional development related to special education for teachers, teachers' assistants, principals, supervisory officers, and other staff. Topics would include universal design, differentiated instruction, effective teaching and curriculum-based assessment strategies, collaborative problem-solving approaches, and assistive technology. In-service should be offered in collaboration with professional associations whenever possible. Opportunities should also be provided for parents to access information and resources.
- Coordinate all professional development opportunities to include effective practices that would benefit students with special education needs.
- Use the results from the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) Special Education Projects of 2005–06, as well as other education research initiatives, to identify training gaps and to inform a provincial professional development strategy, where appropriate.
- Establish standards that define roles and responsibilities for teachers' assistants. Training requirements should be established following a review of current diploma/apprenticeship options. Training for teachers' assistants should be accessible province-wide.

- Require completion of the Additional Qualification Course, Special Education, Specialist, or the equivalent, for educators and school administrators specifically responsible for special education programs and services, such as learning support teachers and teachers of special education classes.

3. Identification and Support Options

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability

Educators would have the skills and knowledge to incorporate continuous educational and classroom assessments into their program planning. They would have access to personnel with expertise in curriculum delivery and behaviour strategies who could provide additional advice on the provision of appropriate accommodations and curriculum. In addition to expertise in curriculum support, coordinated community resources would be available to the classroom teacher.

Objective:
There is greater reliance on educational and classroom assessments than medical/ psychological assessments

When the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process is initiated, it should work in tandem with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. The timelines associated with an IPRC should never mean a delay in the delivery of services to students. The teacher and student would have access to the supports and resources needed to support student achievement during the IPRC process.

IEPs would be developed in a timely manner. Details of the learning environment, such as the provision of accommodations and modified expectations, would be recorded in the student's IEP.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Ensure that school boards provide appropriate special education programs and services for students awaiting completion of the IPRC process.
- Revise IPRC and IEP policy to promote effective parent participation, streamline processes, and reduce administrative burden, while ensuring a focus on student needs and outcomes.
- Mandate and support the implementation of a provincial IEP template. Provide direction and training to maximize the effectiveness of IEP usage as set out in *The Individual Education Plan (IEP) – A Resource Guide (2004).*

4. Service Integration

Goal: Develop capacity to build more cooperative connections between schools, agencies, and families of children facing learning and behavioural challenges

Objective:
Coordination at all levels and across all ministries, will maximize service, avoid duplication, identify gaps, and enhance future planning

Service integration and coordination across all ministries, school boards and community agencies is a priority. The government would facilitate and require ongoing coordination and integration of services among various professionals and service agencies. As well, information and resources would be shared among and across boards so that students with a range of educational and health needs can

be effectively supported. Educators would play a lead role in coordinating service delivery and case management. For example, mental health programs would be part of coordinated service that facilitates information sharing and joint planning.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Create a multi-ministry framework, led by the education sector, that supports an integrated service delivery and funding model and the identification of measureable outcomes related to the delivery of an integrated service to students with special education needs.
- Reduce the barriers to service delivery and ensure shared funding and a commitment that services would be provided regardless of traditional roles of ministries, institutions, and agencies.
- Require that school boards work collaboratively with service providers.

5. Parent Collaboration

Goal: Enhance collaborative relationships between educators and parents and reduce conflict in the system

In this transformed system, parents would be active participants in decisions related to the program and services for their children with special education needs. A collaborative process in which individuals demonstrate a mutual willingness to work together – to listen and to understand – that engages parents in a culturally sensitive manner and provides access to the necessary information and support networks would enable parents to participate meaningfully in the school system. The role of parents would be clarified and

they would feel confident that their participation is valued. When appropriate, student involvement in the process would also be encouraged.

In recognition and mutual respect of the role students, teachers, parents, and administrators play in the development of an IEP, each would share information as part of the IEP process related to the identification of accommodations and/or the development of appropriate modified curriculum or alternative expectations. The IEP would provide clear communication to parents regarding assessment and would be coordinated with the report card as part of the reporting-to-parents process.

Parents would understand the expectations laid out in IEPs because they would have been part of the process of establishing these agreed-upon goals for their child. Success in implementing and attaining the IEP expectations would be measured and shared with the parents.

Objective:
Parents and students will be active participants in the process related to program and service decisions for their children with special education needs

When a student has an IEP, it would be understood that families would have a minimum of at least one additional opportunity every year, outside of regularly scheduled report card meetings, to meet with the personnel working with their children for a collaborative discussion.

If at any time, in this process, a conflict arose between the family and the school that was not easily resolved, school boards and parents would have access to a pool of trained and culturally sensitive advocates/mediators who could help to find common ground and resolve the issue in a timely manner.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Require training for educators and administrators on effective IPRC practices and IEP development, implementation, and monitoring that focuses on collaborative communication with parents in pre-service, in-service, and professional development programs.
- Require school boards to develop, with input from their Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC), informal dispute resolution processes for issues related to programs and services for students with special education needs. A mandatory dispute resolution process should also be developed for use when all school and district attempts to resolve issues have been exhausted. School boards and parents would have access to trained and culturally sensitive mediators.
- Include targeted support for parents of students with special education needs in the mandate of the provincial Parent Engagement Office.
- Conduct research on effective parent involvement in decision-making on special education programs and services.

6. Accountability and Reporting

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability.

Objective:
The ministry has the necessary data and information to ensure that funds have been utilized in an effective and efficient manner that is consistent with best available knowledge and with existing ministry policies.

The *Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans (2000)* would be revised to require that they align with and complement other school and board improvement plans. The plan would set targets and report on the year-over- year improvements in such things as implementation and attainment of IEP expectations, success rates of mediation processes, and levels of parent and student satisfaction with special education processes.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- **Revise its standards for special education board plans to ensure that the plans align with and complement other school and board improvement plans. Revisions would focus on setting targets to improve both program planning and accountability for student achievement and extend the use of effective instructional/assessment practices. This revised focus would mean less emphasis on descriptions of special education programs and services in board plans.**
- **Require schools and school boards as part of their improvement plans to include special education as an integral part of their strategy towards improving student achievement.**
- **Develop a provincial framework for conducting cyclical reviews of school boards with respect to their special education practices. Elicit**

information related to parent, SEAC, and community satisfaction with the delivery of programs and services. Track resource allocation, program delivery, outcomes for students, and integrated service delivery at both the elementary and secondary levels.

- Revise provincial report card policy to better align with IEP requirements. Require schools to include IEP expectations with report card for the purposes of keeping parents informed. Include an option for indicating that a student is progressing well on individualized (modified) expectations.

7. Research

Goal: Increased capacity of all staff to educate a wider range of learners.

Objective:
All staff have the knowledge and skills to provide supports and interventions to meet the needs of students in a timely and effective manner.

School boards would foster exemplary practice and local innovation in classrooms. Research initiatives, including action and participatory research, would be fed by questions from the field and supported in boards with adequate capacity and expertise. The Ministry of Education would take a leadership role by implementing mechanisms for capturing effective practices and programming strategies as they evolve, modelling effective and innovative practice, establishing centres of excellence, and sharing knowledge with the system, to foster cross-germination of ideas.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- Create a provincial special education research framework that links the ministry, school boards, federations, community agencies, parent associations, universities, and other postsecondary institutions. This framework would include action and participatory research and outreach activities to identify and share successful evidence-based practices and programs. The framework would support multiple research centres combined with a virtual, electronic portal for just-in-time access to information. Effective practices and programs would be used to inform provincial policy.

8. Special Education Funding Allocation

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability

In order to support the transformed system described above, the Special Education Grant would also be transformed. Special education funding would remain protected, which means that boards would be required to spend all these funds on special education programs and services. If a board did not spend all of its special education allocation, what remained of it would need to be placed in a special education reserve fund and used for special education in the future.

Objective:
School boards receive funding in a predictable and equitable manner that supports planning, responsiveness, and the delivery of effective programs and services

The special education funding allocation model would be predictable and stable over time, so that school boards could predict their funding in future years. By changing the funding formula, the focus

of boards' efforts could shift to service planning and improving efficiency in the use of resources, instead of reporting and verifying claims to the ministry.

> ***Objective:***
> *School staff have the capacity to provide supports and interventions to meet the needs of students in a timely and effective manner.*

A new funding formula for the High Needs Amount would be implemented, using boards' rates of students with high needs. Boards' High Needs Amount allocations would be recalculated into board by board per-pupil funding benchmarks. These amounts would vary across school boards because they reflect the variation in the incidence of students with high needs. The formula would include the results and the resources allocated through the 2005–06 Net New Needs process.

Each board's High Needs Allocation would be calculated by multiplying their High-Needs-per-pupil benchmark by their total student enrolment. In the future, boards' High Needs amounts would vary with changes in board enrolments. Additionally, a research/review process would be developed and used collaboratively with school boards to confirm the validity of, or track changes to, current rates of students with high needs.

The other components of the Special Education Grant would remain in place. These are the Special Education Per Pupil Amount (SEPPA), Special Equipment Amount, funding for education programs in youth justice and care and treatment programs, and the Special Incidence Portion (SIP). Students with special education needs would continue to benefit from all of the other components of Ministry of Education funding.

In order to support this reform to the funding formula, further work would be done to:

- examine the cost of the education of French-language students with very high needs;
- understand the characteristics and context of the students with very high needs currently supported by SIP, so that the use of a model that is based on staff assignments can be replaced with criteria that reflect students' characteristics and environmental context;
- research the variation in boards' high-needs rates in order to find ways to ensure that the High Needs Amount allocation correctly reflects the changes in the distribution of students with high needs across the province over time;
- develop cyclical reviews of boards to examine resource allocations, program delivery, and outcomes for students;
- analyze the current level of SEPPA grants at the elementary and secondary levels; and
- review the model of service delivery, currently known as Section 20, with respect to the effectiveness of program delivery and the level of funding.

The Working Table recommends that the ministry:

- **Develop and phase in a simpler, streamlined funding process that provides protected special education funds that flow to boards in a predictable manner.**
- **Review the impact of the proposed modifications on the provincial French-language education system.**

- Beginning in 2006–07, allocate funds to boards based on enrolment (SEPPA), enrolment plus the board-specific incidence of students with high needs (including adjustments for Net New Needs), and direct funding for students with extremely high needs (SIP).
- Continue funding for special education equipment and for education programs in youth justice and care and treatment programs.
- Develop a research/review process to confirm the validity of, or track changes in, current rates of students with high needs to inform future funding decisions.
- Revise the process for funding students with extremely high needs to respond to their characteristics and contextual situations.
- Provide additional funds that would be targeted for innovation and research on effective practices for students with special education needs.

NEXT STEPS

Broader public engagement was seen as an important next step. To facilitate broader public engagement, the Working Table proposed several strategies. In general, advice for public engagement was that:

- the purpose of engagement must be clear, that is, whether it is to be a consultation or a mechanism to receive feedback needs to be decided;
- engagement must allow sufficient time for stakeholder comment; and
- the nature of the engagement may vary depending on the stakeholder group.

School board staff should receive direct contact rather than a mailed document. Release time should be funded. Special education transformation must be positioned as a part of overall education reform.

Parents and the general public, including provincial parent associations and SEAC members, should have access to multi-language presentations and a variety of opportunities for comment.

Information should be organized to highlight policy/program recommendations that would be supported by changes to the mechanism used for funding. Increased accountability and improved outcomes for students would be the focus.

CONCLUSION

The Working Table believes that Ontario is, and will continue to be, a leader in the design and delivery of special education programs and services. Members of the Working Table explored a number of program policy and funding models used in other jurisdictions and have concluded that no ideal model currently exists. Given this reality, the Working Table believes that the implementation of its recommendations would enhance the ability of the province's education system to meet the complex needs of its diverse range of learners.

The strength of publicly funded education is based in its ability to foster an environment to meet the needs of all students and to allow all students to develop to their fullest potential.

SUMMARY OF WORKING TABLE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY

1. Student Success and Access to Curriculum

Goal: Improved learning for all students receiving special education programs and services.

- Coordinate all ministry initiatives related to improving student achievement (e.g., Student Success, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat) to include students who have special education needs.

- Require all curriculum documents and related forms (such as report cards) to address the needs of the full range of learners in the school system.

- Develop resources related to effective instructional practices or program indicators for educators based on specific learning profiles and/or areas of need.

- Continue to refine and develop appropriate measures to assess and track progress of those students who have modified curriculum expectations and/or alternative programs, including measures for pre-Grade 1 and alternative skills.

- Investigate, share, and implement effective transition practices for students with special education needs. Multiple transition points such as entry to school, between schools, between elementary and secondary panels, and school to postsecondary destinations should be characterized by collaboration between professionals, family and student and by coordination of service providers.

2. Professional Development

Goal: Increased capacity of all staff to educate a wider range of learners.

- Require, through the Ontario College of Teachers, the completion of a minimum of a half-course on special education before issuing an Ontario teaching certificate.
- Provide direction and funding for specific and systematic professional development related to special education for teachers, teachers' assistants, principals, supervisory officers, and other staff. Topics would include universal design, differentiated instruction, effective teaching and curriculum-based assessment strategies, collaborative problem-solving approaches and assistive technology. In-service should be offered in collaboration with professional associations whenever possible. Opportunities should also be provided for parents to access information and resources.
- Coordinate all professional development opportunities to include effective practices that would benefit students with special education needs.
- Use the results from the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) Special Education Projects of 2005–06, as well as other education research initiatives, to identify training gaps and to inform a provincial professional development strategy, where appropriate.
- Establish standards that define roles and responsibilities for teachers' assistants. Training requirements should be established following a review of current diploma/apprenticeship options. Training for teachers' assistants should be accessible province-wide.
- Require completion of the Additional Qualification Course, Special Education, Specialist, or the equivalent, for educators and school

administrators specifically responsible for special education programs and services, such as learning support teachers and teachers of special education classes.

3. Identification and Support Options

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability.

- Ensure that school boards provide appropriate special education programs and services for students awaiting completion of the IPRC process.

- Revise IPRC and IEP policy to promote effective parent participation, streamline processes, and reduce administrative bu[illegible], while ensuring a focus on student needs and outcomes.

- Mandate and support the implementation of a provincial IEP template. Provide direction and training to maximize the effectiveness of IEP usage as set out in *The Individual Education Plan (IEP) – A Resource Guide (2004)*.

4. Service Integration

Goal: Develop capacity to build more cooperative connections between schools, agencies, and families of children facing learning and behavioural challenges.

- Create a multi-ministry framework, led by the education sector, that supports an integrated service delivery and funding model and the identification of measurable outcomes related to the delivery of an integrated service to students with special education needs.

- Reduce the barriers to service delivery and ensure shared funding and a commitment that services would be provided regardless of traditional roles of ministries, institutions, and agencies.

- Require that school boards work collaboratively with service providers.

5. Parent Collaboration

Goal: Enhance collaborative relationships between educators and parents and reduce conflict in the system.

- Require training for educators and administrators on effective IPRC practices and IEP development, implementation, and monitoring that focuses on collaborative communication with parents in pre-service, in-service, and professional development programs.

- Require school boards to develop, with input from their Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC), informal dispute resolution processes for issues related to programs and services for students with special education needs. A mandatory dispute resolution process should also be developed for use when all school and district attempts to resolve issues have been exhausted. School boards and parents would have access to trained and culturally sensitive mediators.

- Include targeted support for parents of students with special education needs in the mandate of the provincial Parent Engagement Office.

- Conduct research on effective parent involvement in decision-making on special education programs and services.

6. Accountability and Reporting

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability.

- Revise the ministry's standards for special education board plans to ensure that the plans align with and complement other school and board improvement plans. Revisions would focus on setting targets to improve program planning and accountability for student achievement and extend the use of effective instructional/assessment practices. This revised focus would mean less emphasis on descriptions of special education and services in board plans.

- Require schools and school boards as part of their improvement plans to include special education as an integral part of their strategy towards improving student achievement.

- Develop a provincial framework for conducting cyclical reviews of school boards with respect to their special education practices. Elicit information related to parent, SEAC, and community satisfaction with the delivery of programs and services. Track resource allocation, program delivery, outcomes for students and integrated service delivery at both the elementary and secondary levels.

- Revise provincial report card policy to better align with IEP requirements. Require schools to include IEP expectations with report card for the purposes of keeping parents informed. Include an option for indicating that a student is progressing well on individualized (modified) expectations.

7. Research

Goal: Increased capacity of all staff to educate a wider range of learners.

- Create a provincial special education research framework that links the ministry, school boards, federations, community agencies, parent associations, universities and other post-secondary institutions. This framework would include action and participatory research and outreach activities to identify and share successful evidence-based practices and programs. The framework would support multiple research centres combined with a virtual, electronic portal for just-in-time access to information. Effective practices and programs would be used to inform provincial policy.

8. Special Education Funding Allocation

Goal: Improve the balance between the focus on learning and the need for appropriate processes, documentation, and accountability.

- Develop and phase in a simpler, streamlined funding process that provides protected special education funds that flow to boards in a predictable manner.
- Review the impact of the proposed modifications on the provincial French-language education system.
- Beginning in 2006–07, allocate funds to boards based on enrolment (SEPPA), enrolment plus the board-specific incidence of students with high needs (including adjustments for Net New Needs), and direct funding for students with extremely high needs (SIP).
- Continue funding for special education equipment and for education programs in youth justice and care and treatment programs.

- Develop a research/review process to confirm the validity of or track changes to current rates of students with high needs to inform future funding decisions.
- Revise the process for funding students with extremely high needs to respond to their characteristics and contextual situations.
- Provide additional funds that would be targeted for innovation and research on effective practices for students with special education needs.

APPENDIX

WORKING TABLE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM – MEMBERSHIP

Organizations/Associations

Association des conseillers (ères) des écoles publiques de L'Ontario (ACÉPO)

Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)

Association des enseingantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)

Association Franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholique (AFOCSC)

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (CPCO)

Chiefs of Ontario

Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs

Faculties of Education

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

Ontario Association of Deans of Education

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE)

Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association (OCSOA)

Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations (OFHSA)

Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)

Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA)

Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA)

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)

Ontario Secondary Students' Association (OSSA)

Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA/AECO)

Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF)

People for Education

Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees (PAAC on SEAC)

Provincial Schools

Additional representation

Input was provided from Aboriginal representatives, English language learners, and individuals from various cultural groups, some of whom are members of the organizations listed above.

Printed on recycled paper
06-164
ISBN 1-4249-1647-X (Print)
ISBN 1-4249-1648-8 (HTML)
ISBN 1-4249-1649-6 (PDF)
© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2006